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AUTHOR Rogers, L. Edna; Millar, Frank E.
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ABSTRACT

Data collected from 161 married couples were analyzed for communication patterns indicative of "domineeringness" and "transactional redundancy" (the degree of randomness contained within a couple's communicative behavior). From this data came the following observations: There is a negative correlation between domineeringness, particularly by the husband, and transactional redundancy. The more "one-up" statements (asserting definitional rights) made by the husband, the more flexible the couple's transactional patterns. High levels of domineeringness or dominance by either spouse caused both members of the dyad to have lower levels of understanding. The more domineering/dominant member exhibited lower levels of understanding than the other member. Transactional redundancy had a negative relation to both message control intensity and distancing movements. A domineering style by either husband or wife suggested a less submissive posture from the other. Couples with equivalent dominance patterns had more flexibility in their interactions, more frequent discussions about who did what when, and more conflict potential in conversations yet more up to date expectations of each other. Couples with increasingly more discrepant dominance structures showed more rigidity in their transactional patterns, less frequent discussions about who did what when, more apparent "harmony" but less accurate and up to date expectations of each other, and greater "rebellion" potential. (RL)

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A HOLISTIC DESCRIPTION OF TRANSACTIONAL PATTERNS IN MARITAL DYADS:

FOCUS ON REDUNDANCY

by

L. Edna Rogers .
and
Frank E. Millar

Department of Communication
Cleveland State University

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with relational redundancy; its theoretical and therapeutic implications. The emphasis on redundancy flows out of several related trends in the areas of communication and therapy. One is the increasing effort to focus on aspects of communication interchange that go beyond the content level of messages. It seems that ever since "the word fell out of the sentence" to use Bronowski's phrase (1978:38), homo sapiens have been hung-up on words and the referential aspects of these words. Communication phenomena that are unrelated to "content easily pass unnoticed even by the most sophisticated observers" (Lennard & Bernstein, 1969:21).

In large part the impact of the conceptual writings of Bateson and his colleagues (e.g., Bateson, 1951, 1972; Watzlawick et al. 1967) was to re-remind communication oriented researchers of the contextual frame of words--the presentational dimensions of messages that carry at least an implicit, "command" aspect (Danziger, 1976). This inherent duality of messages does not erode the import of either aspect, but emphasizes the simultaneous, hierarchical "nesting" of one within the other. Thus a major trend has been the evolving attention given to relational level variables of communication.

Since the relational dimension refers to properties that reside in the message exchange process per se, another trend has been the accompanying focus on reciprocity and process, the occurrence of events over time and the transactional characteristics of these occurrences. To characterize message

exchange properties, it is necessary to distinguish interactional sequences and the patterning of these sequences. The concept of redundancy, first introduced within the framework of information theory, refers to the predictability of the reoccurrence of a given sequence. Thus redundancy is an index of pattern, of organization and constraint. As Miller stated, all the fuss about information theory was that it provided "a yardstick for measuring organization" (1953:3). Redundancy represents movement away from randomness, toward an unequal probability of events, toward a hierarchy of structure.

The application of the concept of redundancy to index communication patterns in relational settings has expanded the concept beyond its original, more formal meaning, but as Raush et al. have emphasized, it is perhaps "the most central construct by which the family is described and in the pragmatic sense known" (1979:471). Further, the concept of redundancy has the most direct linkage with one of the most widely espoused notions in the family clinical literature, and that is, that overly redundant interaction patterns are related to individual and family pathologies (Jackson, 1959; Haley, 1964; Murrell & Stachowiak, 1965, 1967; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967; Beels & Ferber, 1969).

A major theoretical stance of family system studies is the functionality of flexible redundancy--an optimal mix of connectedness and separateness. It is proposed that well functioning systems will evidence both a relatively predictable set of relational definitions and the ability to redefine, modify these patterns to adapt to changing situations and/or to avoid relational stagnation. Systems that have a more limited range of variation in their patterns are hypothesized to be less able to adapt and will be associated with negative relational consequences. Traditionally, over reliance on symmetrical communication patterns have been theoretically related to unsettled definitional states and relational instability, while over reliance

on complementarity and a lack of alteration of one-up and one-down positions have been related to deadening routinization and stifling relational patterns. The former is hypothesized to produce system stress with a continuing failure to negotiate relational definitions and the latter to produce avoidance and/or hollow obligatory interaction. Both types of rigidity, redundancy of pattern, are predicted to be inversely related to positive system functioning.

The major purposes of this paper are (1) to describe our efforts to identify relational patterns and index the redundancies of these patterns, (2) to review our findings related to relational redundancy, and (3) to suggest therapeutic implications stemming from this work.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The relational approach to communication assumes that people do not relate and then talk, rather they relate in talk (Duncan, 1967:249), that the exchange of messages is the relationship (Bateson, 1972:275). The process of exchanging messages is not predetermined by socially prescribed roles nor personality traits, but is a formative process in its own right (Blumer, 1969:53). Relationships emerge from the exchange of messages, are immanent within them; the factuality of a relationship is its shape, not its content (Duncan, 1968:77).

Everyday conversation, as well as the language of social science, refers to the structural shape of relationships but tend to assume that the explanations of the patterns reside within interactors. These abstractions, however, are only known and knowable through redundant, interlocked cycles of behaviors. Relationships are continually negotiated and co-defined rather than unilaterally "caused" by personal qualities and/or social role prescriptions. Any given individual and/or social context and/or message can propose a relational pattern, but by itself cannot establish one.

Given this conceptualization of social relationships, the methodological question becomes how to describe these redundant, cyclical patterns. If we are to take "social interaction seriously" (Blumer, 1969:53)--where seriously means that the organizing process per se is a major consideration in explaining behavioral consequences--then typologies and procedures of inquiry must be developed that index this process. The traditional linear, causal model, from which social scientists have "deduced" that communication relationships are simply "expressions" of underlying factors which are "really" the determinates of the shape of the pattern, must be replaced.

The language of systems theory, with its emphasis on boundary specifications, self-reflexive loops, equifinality, emergence, structural/functional holons, hierarchical levels, and evolutionary processes seems appropriate for the development of these new perspectives. It must be remembered that languages are neither "true" nor "false," they are simply useful or reasonable for the purposes at hand. For our purpose of establishing procedures and measures that describe and differentiate relational patterns and their consequences, the language of cybernetics and systems philosophy seems reasonable and well suited to the task. (Lapointe, 1975; Buckley, 1967, 1968; Fisher, 1975; Bateson, 1972).

In line with Korzybski's (1958:22-29) emphasis that all knowledge is basically structural, our research efforts have attempted to develop a reliable, useable method for describing the communication structure (i.e., relational "shape") of interpersonal relationships. A viable research methodology is a necessary step towards translating the insightful, but meta-theoretic assumptions of the systemic approach into testable descriptions of communication dynamics. Once such methods are devised, comparative functional and evolutionary analyses of various relational patterns can begin to provide empirically-grounded, middle-range theories of how

differences in communication patterns make a difference in our everyday behavior. Given that a system's "meaning" is provided by its functional interdependence with other systems in its environment (e.g., the "meaning" of a heart is the part it plays in the body and not in a description of its chambers, arteries, muscles, etc.), these analyses will provide a sense of understanding about communication dynamics that we believe cannot be attained solely through more traditional methods.

Accordingly, our research efforts (Rogers, 1972; Millar, 1973; Millar & Rogers, 1976; Rogers-Millar & Millar, 1979; Courtright, Millar & Rogers, 1979; Millar, Rogers & Courtright, 1979; Rogers, Courtright & Millar, 1980; Courtright, Millar & Rogers, 1980a; Courtright, Millar & Rogers, 1980b) have been aimed at exploring the utility of the Rogers and Farace (1975) coding scheme for describing relational structures of interpersonal conversation. Although at least three generic dimensions of relationships have been discerned (control, trust and intimacy--Millar & Rogers, 1976; power, meaning and affect--Kantor & Lehr, 1975; influence, integration and intimacy--Danziger, 1976) the control dimension has had priority in our research. To date, we are fairly confident with the development of three control related variables--domineeringness, dominance and redundancy.

Redundancy has been the primary focus of the Fisher approach to relational analyses (Ellis & Fisher, 1975; Fisher & Werbell, 1979; Fisher & Beach, 1979; Fisher, 1980). These researchers use Markovian statistics to describe the probabilistic communication structure that emerges during conversation. The resulting probability matrices "characterize" the underlying structure. We have taken a different approach to redundancy, even though theirs is admittedly more consistent with the epistemological underpinnings of our jointly held approach, in the belief that the Markovian results will be more difficult to assimilate with existing social science literature. This

assimilation must take place if the cumulative nature of scientific endeavors is to be advanced as well as to demonstrate the usefulness and efficacy of relational approaches to communication studies.

METHODOLOGY

Functionally, the control dimension is concerned with definitional "rights," with who has the right to define, delimit, constrain the actions of the interpersonal system. Temporally, control concerns are always of the present since the right to define will vary over content and situational contexts. Structurally, these definitional rights are manifested in the "command" (Bateson, 1951) or "instructional" (Bronowski, 1978) or "presentational" (Danzinger, 1976) or "relational" (Millar & Rogers, 1976) implications of messages. These implications provide the immediate context within which the "report" or "informational" or "representational" or "content" aspects can be interpreted and assigned meaning. Although it is reasonable to assume that much of the "command" aspects are displayed through non-verbal messages, it is also reasonable to assert that they are "contained" in verbalized messages. Our efforts have concentrated on this latter arena and have tried to "capture" these implications.

Coding Procedures:

The descriptive tool used to operationalize the control dimension has been the coding scheme developed by Ericson & Rogers (1973) and Rogers & Farace (1975).¹ Following Sluzki and Beavin's (1965) premise that the control implications of a verbal message are rooted in both its grammatical and response form, this coding scheme was designed to numerically categorize these aspects for any given utterance. The grammatical codes used are: (1) assertion,

(2) question, (3) talk-over,² (4) non-complete, and (5) other. The response codes utilized are: (1) support, (2) nonsupport, (3) extension, (4) answer, (5) instruction, (6) order, (7) disconfirmation, (8) topic change, (9) initiation-termination, and (0) other.

Each message in a conversation is assigned a three-digit code. The first code designates the speaker, the second the grammatical form and the third the response mode of the message relative to the preceding message. In this way, any given conversation can be represented by a series of sequentially coded numerical codes.³

The next step in the coding procedures is to translate these numerical codes into control maneuvers. These transformations are made on the basis of whether a message is: (a) an attempt to assert definitional rights--a one-up (+) movement; (b) a request or an acceptance of the other's definition of the relationship--a one-down (+) maneuver; or (c) a non-demanding, non-accepting, leveling message--a one-across (+) maneuver.

Finally, by combining the control directions of contiguous messages, the minimal structural unit of a relationship is created. This smallest structural unit, termed a transact, is then used as the primary data in classifying the basic types of control patterns. In a complementary transact, the control directions are directionally opposite (i.e. ++ or ++); the definition of the relationship offered by one interactant is accepted by the other. With symmetrical transacts, (i.e. ++, ++ and ++) the control directions are the same. Each interactor behaves toward the other as the other behaved towards them; thus, there is a similarity in definitions manifested by the participants. In transitional transacts, (i.e. ++, ++ and ++, ++) the directions are different but not opposite, with one of the participants executing a one-across leveling movement.

Two Major Control Indices

Based on these distinctions, domineeringness is assumed to be a process description and is operationally defined by the number of one-up moves made by an individual during an ongoing conversation ($\text{domineeringness} = \uparrow / \text{total number of control maneuvers}$). Dominance is both a momentary outcome and a process description, depending on how the index is used. It is operationally defined by the number of one-up moves responded to with a one-down maneuver. Dominance, then, is represented by the complementary transact where the control assertion of one interactant has been accepted by the other ($\text{dominance} = \text{given} \uparrow / \text{X} \downarrow$).

Dividing one spouse's score by the other's score provides domineeringness and dominance ratios which are assumed to be relationally specific characteristics and patterns.⁴ The use of these measures provides information about both an individual's behavior with the other (i.e., domineeringness) as well as relationally specific patterns of verbal behavior (i.e., dominance and the two ratios).

Message Control Intensity

In the continuing attempt to develop useful descriptions of relational patterns, an expansion of the Rogers-Farace scheme was recently proposed (Rogers, Courtright & Millar, 1980). The expansion is a relatively content-free measure of message control intensity derived from an implicit distancing continuum inherent within the coding scheme logic. The intensity index is based on the number of ways grammatical codes and response modes can be other than one-up maneuvers. According to this criterion, the grammatical codes and response modes were ranked separately from least to most intense and assigned a numerical weight. The final intensity values were obtained by multiplying the two intensity weights together for each of the 50 message

types. The intensity scores for the three control maneuvers range from 5 to 50 for one-up, 2 to 12 for one-across, and 1 to 10 for one-down.

Two measures of intensity have been used in our studies (Rogers, Courtright & Millar, 1980; Courtright, Millar & Rogers, 1980a; Courtright, Millar & Rogers, 1980b). Message intensity is the numerical weight assigned to each of the 50 message types. Intensity distance is the absolute difference in intensity values for any two contiguous messages. The potential of these measures for "graphing" conversations transactionally is illustrated by using a wave analogy. Prior to this effort, the graphing of the height of the "waves" of sequentially ordered relational control maneuvers was limited to the three control maneuvers of one-up, one-down, and one-across. The intensity measure increases the variation along the vertical axis and thus the ability to index more detail of the rise and fall of conversational waves. With this expansion, transactional configurations can be more finely differentiated.

Another advantage of the inclusion of an intensity dimension is the increased ability for indexing relational patterns at the meta-pattern level, i.e., the pattern of patterns. Prior to the development of this measure, pattern identification was limited to the redundancies of the transactional types, but now redundancy measures, based on a potentially larger range of fluctuation, are possible.

In sum, various data types and levels are derivable from the use of the Rogers-Farace coding procedures: (1) content categories;⁵ (2) control directions of relational movements; (3) transact structures; and (4) patterns of transacts. The first two types of data use the individual message as the unit of analysis; the latter two use the relationship as the unit, either partially or holistically. To date, most of our work has concentrated on the second and third types of data generated by these coding procedures although we are increasingly moving toward the more encompassing fourth type of information.

Relational Redundancy

A major goal of relational communication research is to identify and explain the recurrent or redundant patterns (i.e., form) of interaction which characterize interpersonal relationships. Initially, the degree of variability of transactional patterns that characterized a dyad's ongoing sequence of message control exchange was referred to in terms of a rigidity-flexibility continuum (Millar, 1973; Millar & Rogers, 1976). Later we felt that transactional redundancy was a more appropriate label for this continuum with rigidity and flexibility referring to the upper and lower ranges. This index of redundancy (similar in nature to the early work by Haley, 1964, 1967) is based on the number of transactional types manifested by a couple within the total set of possible transacts. The fewer the number of transactional types used, the more redundant the transactional structure.

Transactional redundancy reflects the degree of randomness contained within a dyad's communicative behavior and is operationally defined as the sum of the absolute deviations from random use of the nine transactional types described in the Rogers-Farace coding scheme. Thus the more a couple exhibits an equal usage of transactional types, the more flexible (more random) their interaction pattern and, in reverse, the more a couple tends to use a smaller set of transactional types, the more rigid (less random) their conversation style.

Recently, a more global index of redundancy has been devised to assess the overall variation of a dyad's interaction form (Courtright, Millar & Rogers, 1980b). This statistical index, the coefficient of variation, is based on message intensity scores and represents a standardized index of a dyad's variation as a proportion of its central tendency. In the terminology of the wave analogy, it represents the overall "modulation" of a dyad's

intensity wave divided by the homeostatic "set point" of that wave. The CV measure is operationalized by dividing the standard deviation of a dyad's intensity scores by the dyad's mean intensity value.

The research potentials of an overall index of relational form are far greater than its relatively simple calculation. It will allow across-relational and across-situation comparisons of interactional systems. The ability to index larger patterns within which smaller segments of the pattern can be described will greatly enhance our understanding of relational dynamics and theoretical progress. Research efforts utilizing the CV measure for differentiating and comparing marital couples evidencing different levels of interaction redundancy is now underway. The promise of these efforts may add significantly to our present research findings.

Sample

The results to be described come from two data sets of white husband and wife dyads (a total of 65 in the first and 96 in the second) randomly sampled from two midwestern metropolitan areas. On the average, the couples had been married about 12 years, were in their mid-thirties, and in the active child-rearing stage. In general, the couples were in the middle social-class range, with an average of 12 years of education for wives and 14 for husbands.

After obtaining the couples' agreement to participate in the study, two types of data were collected during two-hour interviews in their home. First, self-report information concerning various aspects of their marital relationship were obtained from each husband and wife separately. Secondly, interaction data were obtained by tape-recording each couple's discussion of four topics. The couples were asked to discuss each topic as completely as they could in ten minutes. The recorded discussions were later transcribed

and coded according to the relational procedures outlined. These procedures resulted in a total data base of approximately 23,000 transacts.

The percentage of complementary transacts (12%) was the same in both studies. There were slightly fewer transition transacts (52% vs. 58%) observed in the second study and proportionately more symmetrical (36% vs. 30%) transacts. Concerning the control maneuvers, approximately one-half of all messages in both samples were one-across statements. Husbands manifested slightly more one-up movements than their wives in the first study (25% vs. 24%) but this was reversed in the second study (26% vs. 29%).

RESEARCH RESULTS

In reviewing the small but accumulating set of findings concerning relational redundancy, we will begin by looking at the relevant results associated with domineeringness and dominance. The studies investigating these control patterns (Rogers-Millar & Millar, 1979; Courtright, Millar & Rogers-Millar, 1979) have found that domineeringness is not related to dominance. In other words, the giving off of one-up messages is not related to having these maneuvers responded to with a one-down movement (resulting in a one-up complementary transact). However, the more domineering one interactor is, the less likely the other will occupy a dominant position. Of further interest is the negative correlation found between domineeringness, particularly husband domineeringness, and transactional redundancy. The more one-up statements made by the husband, the more flexible the couple's transactional patterns.

In addition, however, it was found that domineeringness, especially wife domineeringness, is also related to lower relational satisfaction, more talk-overs and fewer support statements. Thus it seems that

domineering behavior promotes flexibility in a dyad's interaction patterns, but if wives are domineering, the potential benefits of flexibility may be offset by several negative aspects. This suggests a functionality of husband domineeringness and a dysfunctionality of wife domineeringness. However, to continue the saga, both domineeringness and dominance (but more so with dominance), were found to be negatively correlated with the degree of dyadic understanding.⁶ With high levels of domineeringness or dominance by either spouse, both members of the dyad had lower levels of understanding of one another. Interestingly, the more domineering or dominant member exhibited lower levels of understanding than did the less domineering or dominant member.

A follow-up study, using regression analysis techniques, dealt specifically with the association between these relational control patterns and dyadic understanding (Millar, Rogers-Millar & Courtright, 1979). The inverse relationship between domineeringness and understanding was substantiated, but the dominance ratio was clearly the strongest predictor of the level of understanding. It was found that the less the equivalency of the dominance pattern, the less each spouse understood the other. In other words, the more rigidly a complementary pattern, or dominance hierarchy was exhibited, the less each spouse understood the other.

The accumulated findings suggest the following sequence: the more equivalent the dominance pattern (intermixed with husband domineeringness), the more flexibility in the dyad's interaction, the more frequent discussions about who is to do what when, the more conflict potential in the couple's conversations but the more up-to-date the dyad's expectations of one another. In contrast, the more discrepant the dominance structure, the more rigidity in the dyad's transactional pattern, the less frequent discussions about who is to do what when, the more apparent "harmony" in the interaction, but

the less accurate and up-to-date the couple's expectations of each other, and the greater the "rebellion" potential.

The available findings appear to evidence the functionality of the reciprocal complementary pattern (Bateson, 1949) and the mutually enhancing aspects of parallel relationships (Lederer & Jackson, 1968). The proposition concerning the functionality of flexible redundancy seems to receive some support in terms of these findings.

In the earlier research by Millar (1973) couples who were classified as rigid in their use of transactional types exhibited significantly more transitory transactions and one-across symmetry than couples classified as flexible. This type of symmetry was a pattern found by Rogers (1972) to be positively related to marital strain as indexed by role discrepancy. The heavy use of this pattern suggests a rather dull, nonenlivening pattern of interaction, i.e., not much action in the interaction, and by being related to higher levels of marital strain, it may represent an "avoidance" strategy.

Another set of findings to be reviewed concern the interplay between the intensity measures of message control and transactional redundancy. The intensity measures map a couple's movements toward and away from one another via verbal messages. These studies (Rogers, Courtright & Millar, 1980; Courtright, Millar and Rogers, 1980a) illustrate the cybernetic nature of maintaining a characteristic distance vis a vis one another. As expected, one-across movements play a central role in establishing a couple's homeostatic "set point" on the intensity index. The variations around this set point are indicative of the degree of rigidity-flexibility characterizing a couple's conversation. The fewer and the smaller the deviations are from a couple's established "tone," the more redundant the interaction.

Transactional redundancy was found to be negatively related to both message control intensity values and distancing movements. However, it was the distancing response that was found to be most highly related. Using a regression model analysis, Courtright, et al. (1980a) found that the single best predictor of transactional redundancy was the intensity distance of the husbands' one-across responses to their wives' preceeding messages. This relationship indicated that the less intensity distance created by these responses, the more redundant and rigid the conversational pattern. Conversely, the more the husband moved away from the intensity level of the wife's preceeding statement, the less redundant and more flexible the pattern.

This inverse relationship was also found for the intensity distance between the wives' one-across responses and their husbands' preceeding messages. Although both the husband and wife variables are significant predictors, the considerably larger regression coefficients for the husband suggests that the amount of distance created by the husbands' responses is relatively more important in determining the degree of transactional redundancy.

A limitation of this generalization exists when a couple's one-across distancing movements are equal in magnitude. Further analyses of the regression model show that in this situation, the more intense the husbands' one-up messages, the more redundant the relational pattern and the more intense the wife's one-across messages, the less redundant the pattern. However, excluding this more select finding, the overall results of this investigation indicate that it is a lack of one-across movement which signals a more redundant transactional pattern, and, in particular, it is a lack of movement in the husbands' responses that portend this pattern.

In an attempt to interrelate the findings concerning domineeringness,

dominance, and the intensity measures, the following preliminary findings are given and some interpretations are offered. The proportion of domineering (one-up) statements, for both husbands and wives, is not related to the average intensity values of their one-up statements (Rogers, et al., 1980). However, domineeringness is positively related to the average intensity level of one-down statements and to less distancing one-up responses by the spouse. To restate these findings, a domineering style by either husband or wife suggests a less submissive posture from the other, i.e., one-down maneuvers are minimally one-down, and one-up responses are at a similar level to the preceding statement.

The more frequently the husband is in a dominant position, the lower the average intensity of his one-down statements. This may reflect a type of equity or balancing response with the husband being more supportive when his wife frequently accepts his one-up messages. Wife dominance, on the other hand, is positively related to the intensity of husband one-up statements and the distancing of his one-up responses. This finding suggests a "frustration" pattern with the husband "shouting" his infrequent one-up moves in order to be "heard" by his wife who is more frequently in a dominant position. There was a slight indication of this "frustration" picture for the wife also, but the image was more clearly descriptive of husband behavior.

Previously we reported findings which suggest that a more flexible conversational style is observed when the husband is more domineering. In addition, the greater the intensity distance of the husband's one-across responses, the more flexible the couple's conversation. Further, given that the average intensity of the husband's one-up is not directly related to redundancy, but it is an indirect predictor of it, the following interpretations are offered. First when the husband gets "involved" in the conversation and offers

more definition of assertions of the dyad's behaviors, the couple is more likely to negotiate definitions, manifest more verbal conflicts, exchange more information and generally engage in a more "lively" conversation.

Secondly, and in contrast to the above, when the husband offers fewer one-up maneuvers, seems more "detached" from the conversation, the couple is more likely to exhibit higher levels of redundancy. And when the husband does make a domineering message, it is likely to be of a more intense nature suggesting a frustrated, non-negotiating image. It is not the frequency of one-up moves but rather the infrequent manifestation of relatively more intense statements which seems to characterize this style. These interpretations are intuitive and await further confirmation. However, the interactional stance of the husband appears to be a key ingredient in shaping the couple's relational form.

In terms of the larger hypothesis concerning the relational redundancy of communication patterns and family functioning, our data are meager. There is, however, research evidence supportive of more positive relational outcomes being associated with a reciprocity of the complementary transactional pattern, i.e., flexible redundancy, and with more negative outcomes being associated with one-across leveling symmetry. The above research findings give guide to possible therapeutic "targets" in the attempt to modify rigidly redundant patterns.

CONCLUSION

We will conclude by briefly highlighting insights from two different sets of literature as a way of further framing potential therapeutic implications of the research on transactional redundancy. In his classic work on conflict, The Functions of Social Conflict, Coser (1956) asserts that conflicts within groups help to (a) re-establish a sense of unity and

cohesion, (b) revitalize existing norms and rules, and (c) maintain a continual readjustment of the balance of power. However, the functionality of conflict "depends on the types of issues over which it is fought as well as on the type of social structure within which it occurs" (1956:151). Conflicts over basic relational assumptions can tear the group apart; but conflicts dealing with issues within the larger consensual bonds can have an increasing solidifying as well as revitalizing effect. This qualification emphasizes the necessity of studying both content and relational aspects of communicative dynamics.

Secondly, Coser hypothesizes that it is the rigidity of the social structure itself that threatens the maintenance of a relationship rather than the existence of conflicts. Thus, the lack of conflicts cannot be hypothesized to be an index of relational stability and might actually portend the reverse. Thirdly, intimate relations involving the "total personality" of its members, tend to suppress the occurrence of conflict. When conflict does break out amongst intimates, it is likely to be more intense than conflicts between non-intimates.

First, because the conflict does not merely aim at resolving the immediate issue which led to its outbreak; all accumulated grievances which were denied expression previously are apt to emerge at this occasion. Second, because the total personality involvement of the group members makes for mobilization of all sentiment in the conduct of the struggle. (1956:152)

In sum, these three propositions posit that the long-term survival potential of any social system is significantly decreased if it does not adopt organizing processes which encourage yet contain the expression of conflict.

Structurally, an occurrence of conflict, i.e., a "power struggle," consists of two consecutive competitive symmetrical transacts or a double transact of three one-up movements (i.e., +++ in the Rogers-Farace scheme). The tabulation of this type of double-transact easily allows comparisons

within and across couples. Accepting the premise that the absence of these transact structures cannot be taken as an index of marital harmony (Simmel, 1955), the empirical question becomes what is the "healthy" or "desirable" frequency of conflict across which topics? Again we are proposing a curvilinear relationship between frequency of conflict and relational health such that both too few and too many are dysfunctional.

The tabulation of conflicts would also get to the heart of studying the interaction between content and relational aspects of messages, i.e., the translation between levels of analysis. Certainly some topics are more potentially conflictual than others both across and within couples with perhaps conflict about conflict processes being one of the central issues for long-term relationships (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). Descriptively, conflictual topics might be indexed by more intense relational maneuvers with shifts in modal intensity movements indicating the issues the couple must "come to grips with" and learn to meta-communicate about in order to maintain a desirable balance between connectedness and separateness.

From a classic sociological work to "work in progress" in the field of psychiatry, we move from concerns with relational structure to concerns with logical types of content. Not only is there a necessity for awareness of multi-levels of structure and the ability to reframe by moving from first order to second order change (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974), but the work of Bernal and Baker (1979) suggest a heuristically rich, multi-level content oriented framework for mapping and altering couples' interaction. Five levels are defined in terms of interactional content: (1) Objective level, focus on the issue, e.g., a couple's discussion of in-laws, finances, housework; (2) Individual level, focus on person descriptions, often person blame, e.g., "I am/You are;" (3) Transactional level, focus shifts from "You/I" to "You and I" and patterns of relating;

(4) Relational level, a further shift from "You and I" to "Us" and the definitional rules about the relationship; (5) Contextual level, focus on background, experience or goals of couple.

Bernal and Baker state "couples acknowledge 'process' when they interact at any one of the three process levels--3, 4 or 5. At levels 1 and 2, in contrast, couples tend to make use of causal linear thinking" (1979:296). Bernal (1978) found that distressed couples handled conflictual situations most often by attributing the responsibility to self or to other and explained behavior in terms of individual dispositions. The punctuation of the situation was at level 2. Nondistressed couples were equally likely to use a range of levels from Individual (level 2) through Contextual (level 5). "A shift from lower to higher levels when things got stuck was a phenomenon that differentiated most distressed from the nondistressed couples. Nondistressed couples examined punctuational differences" (1979:298). The implications of this study are that distressed couples often get locked into one level (first order), a linear level of thinking/talking, and lack the ability for movement among the different levels (second order). Bernal and Baker suggest that if a health value is implicit in their framework, "it is that of fluidity across the levels versus rigidity at any one level" (1979:301).

The implications for therapy seem similar in both the content and the structural realm of interaction--an emphasis on process, patterns, levels, and reframing. Effective intervention is rooted in the ability to distinguish interactional patterns and levels of patterns, and in the ability to utilize strategies which implement meta level awareness and pattern flexibility of behavioral alternatives (Rogers & Bagarozzi, in press). This appears to be the case with both the control and content dimensions. It is most likely that flexibility in one arena will facilitate flexibility in the other.

In the longer range research goals, it is our intention to investigate and interrelate the patterns of content with the patterns of control.

In conclusion, a favorite quote of ours from Simmel (1950:129) encapsulates the target of our research efforts:

...the common experience of bad marriages between excellent persons and of good marriages between dubious persons suggests that marriage, however much it depends on each of the spouses, may yet have a character not coinciding with either of them.

The attempt to describe and understand this "character" will be multifaceted, yet will necessarily involve a thorough description of how (not why) communicative dynamics establish and maintain the fragile social bonds that hold people together. In discussing the "how" and related implications, we have gone beyond our data. Perhaps we have been too speculative, but our intent was to suggest some of the questions that can be systematically investigated with the methodologies described, to stimulate thoughts and conceptual linkages between divergent views and approaches to the study of relational dynamics.

FOOTNOTES

¹The interested reader is encouraged to see the original articles for a more complete description and justification of the coding procedures. Copies of the coding manual (Rogers, 1979) are available upon request.

²We are presently considering building into the coding scheme the identification of the two separate categories of talk-overs observed in our research. One code would designate "successful" talk-overs (i.e., where the speaker relinquished the conversational floor to the interruptor) and another would designate "unsuccessful" talk-overs (i.e., where the original speaker maintained the floor and did not stop his utterance). In husband and wife conversations the majority of talk-overs seem to function as expressions of support or non-support for what the original speaker is saying and to which adjustments and adaptations are made during the conversational turn. In other words, they function less often as attempts to take over the conversational floor, and more often as immediate and simultaneous feedback to the speaker about his performance during his performance without stopping his turn. In that sense, unsuccessful talk-overs, simultaneous speech, frequently act as "head nods" and encourage the speaker to continue and/or change the content direction of his message. The identification of these different functions would be aided by the use of two separate numerical codes.

³In the initial study utilizing these procedures, the reliability figures ranged from .68 to 1.00, with the average reliability across all comparisons being .86. In the second expanded study with this scheme, the reliability coefficients ranged from .79 to 1.00 with their average being .89. The coding scheme, then, represents a workable, reliable instrument for coding relational aspects of verbal messages. Further, its predictive validity has been recently evidenced by Ayres and Miura (1979) and Bohn and Bock (1980).

⁴Various domineeringness and dominance measures were offered and investigated. The ones defined here were labelled domineeringness and pure dominance (Rogers-Millar & Millar, 1979:241). Submissiveness and pure submission are the exact structural opposites of domineeringness and dominance and are based on the number of one-down movements transmitted and the number of one-down messages responded to with a one-up move. Although potentially useful descriptors of conversational dynamics, these submissive and submission measures have not, as yet, been consistent correlates or predictors of other process behaviors and interspousal perceptions.

⁵Admittedly, the content information provided by these codes is relatively "weak" since this was not the intent of the scheme. Nonetheless, some content information is provided and can be used for various empirical analyses and behavioral descriptions.

⁶Understanding refers to the ability of one spouse to accurately predict the actual responses of the other. In the Millar, et al. (1979) study, understanding was measured by comparing each person's predictions of their

spouse's responses to the 15 role strain items. Our concern in this analysis was not to profile who does do these tasks, but to ascertain how accurately the couple understood each other on who is expected to do them. An index of understanding was created for each spouse by summing the absolute size of the differences between the husband's and wife's predicted and actual responses to these questions. This index is most appropriately described as an index of misunderstanding since the size of the "errors" in predictions were summed. However, we are assuming that the absence of misunderstanding--a score of zero on this index--reflects the presence of understanding on these items.

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